

Interview with Bernard Lavin

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

BERNARD LAVIN

Interviewed by: Mike Brown

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Biosketch

Q: —an oral history review sponsored by the Alumni Association of the U. S. Information Agency. Bernie is going to tell us a little bit about his experience after almost 34 years with the United States Government. Bernie, you want to start out by telling your roots, where you began?

LAVIN: Sure. I was born and raised in New York City, Mike. Now happily in Honolulu as far away as one can get from New York!

Q: I understand you graduated from Boston College.

LAVIN: Yes, I have a master's degree in philosophy from Boston College.

Q: And then before you joined the Agency you had some interesting experiences too, didn't you?

LAVIN: Yes, I did. I was with Pan American World Airways in New York for two years and my job there was keeping track of all Pan American flights in the Atlantic and throughout Europe and Africa. And I learned an awful lot about geography during that time. After Pan

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American I was an instructor in philosophy and English at St. John's University in New York City, in Brooklyn.

First Agency Assignment: Manila, 1952

Q: You joined the Agency in 1952.

LAVIN: That's right.

Q: Where did you expect to go on your first assignment?

LAVIN: I was told that there were two openings and I could have a choice between going to Paris or to Manila. And I surprised everyone by choosing Manila. I explained that I was very interested in Far Eastern philosophies, and I wanted to learn about them and compare them with our Western philosophy. So they said okay. So off to Manila I went. And I never looked back.

Q: Bernie, you spent four or five years in Manila and in Cebu. Do you want to tell us a little bit about your first foreign service assignment, first time overseas? Tell us a little bit about how you felt about both being assigned to the Philippines and the Filipinos and your initial experiences in the Foreign Service.

Philippine Reaction To Death Of Magsaysay

LAVIN: I'd be glad to. When I got to Manila, which was everything I expected it to be and probably more, I was very fortunate to be there at a time when President Magsaysay was on the rise, not only in Manila but in the Visayan area where he often visited as he was getting ready to assume the presidency. So I remember that as a great time.

Q: You were also there, I guess, when he died in the plane crash.

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LAVIN: Yes, as a matter of fact the plane went down about eight miles from where we lived. I was on the same platform with him the night before he died at a special ceremony at the University of Southern Philippines. After his arrival I moved from the platform down to the first row where I sat with President Magsaysay's photographer, Felix Manuel. At one point President Magsaysay leaned over and tied his shoelace. I nudged the photographer and said, "That's a great shot of the President tying his shoelaces. Why don't you get it?" And he did. The photograph is probably the last one that was ever made of President Magsaysay. When they found the plane, many of the bodies were burned and much of the plane was burned. But what had happened is the photographer's equipment was thrown out of the plane up onto a little hill and did not burn. Felix, of course, was killed. And they found this roll of film and published the pictures in the Manila Times.

Q: Including that picture, huh?

LAVIN: Yes, the picture was in the Manila Times about a week later with the notation that no one knew where this picture was taken, but that it was probably the last that was ever taken of President Magsaysay. So I wrote to Joe Bautista, the Editor of the Times, and I told him the circumstances. He printed the story. I will never forget the grief that overwhelmed the Filipinos at the passing of President Magsaysay. I went to the Third Philippine Constabulary Headquarters to view the bodies. There were at least 10,000 Filipinos standing around on the outskirts of the camp. They made comments like this, "He is not dead." "He's in the mountains." "He'll come again." They couldn't believe that he had died. But it was all too obvious that he and the others in that plane died a terrible death. The bodies were badly burned and mangled. Congressman Lopez was a good friend of mine who had often come to our house out in Talisay. To see him in death, terribly burned, was just overpowering.

Q: I remember I was in Hong Kong when Magsaysay died. And it had quite an effect on the community at that time too, you know. They just couldn't believe it had happened. Well,

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Bernie tell us a little bit about the other highlights of your time in the Philippines while you were there that you think the Oral History people would be interested in.

Lavin Names Escort Officer For Mrs. Nixon During Vice President's Visit To Philippines

LAVIN: When I got to Manila, Ralph Busick was the PAO. Four or five months afterwards, he said to me one day, "Bernie, what do you know about women's organizations in the Philippines?" I replied, "Nothing." And he said, "Okay, you had better bone up, you're the program and escort officer for Mrs. Nixon." That's when I found out that Vice President and Mrs. Nixon were coming to the Philippines. And so I became her escort officer. And then I had to do a lot of studying about women's organizations. Then the fateful moment came when Mrs. Nixon was to make her trip downtown to the USIS library and to Tondo.

Q: That's the slum area.

LAVIN: Tondo is the slum area, yes. And I commandeered every Cadillac I could find around the Filipino community and I ended up with 12 of them. I seated Filipino ladies in each one of the cars. And, I had obtained a motorcycle escort. I said to the policeman, "No matter what happens, don't let this motorcade get split. We must keep these 12 cars together, because in the lead car we know how to go downtown to the USIS library and to Tondo." Well, so help me, as soon as we left the Manila Hotel we weren't 300 yards away when the motorcade split in half. And there I was up in the lead car sweating bullets because Mrs. Nixon and the rest of the group had gone off in another direction. I thought, "Well, here's the end of my career in the Foreign Service."

Q: Your first tour.

LAVIN: First major assignment. Well, I rolled down the window of this air conditioned car, and thought, "Well, maybe I'll get some kind of a clue." And sure enough in the distance I heard a siren. I yelled to the driver, "Follow that siren!" So we took off after it. And we very soon got back together again. We arrived at the USIS library and here is a great

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story which I'll never forget. In those days, there was a striking resemblance between Vice President Nixon and myself which many people noted. When I got out of the first car and opened up Mrs. Nixon's door a big crowd of people gathered around. So I led her to the USIS, Mary Aireton took over from there and showed her around and I stayed with the cars. There was a lot of jostling and the police were milling around controlling the crowd. A little old Filipino lady, she must have been 80, was carrying a big box nicely wrapped in white paper with a big red ribbon on it. She came over to me and said, "Mr. Neexon, I traveled 300 miles to bring this gift for Mrs. Neexon." Things were happening so fast all around and I thought, "Well, I can't explain to her I'm not Mr. Nixon." So the first thing that came to my mind was, "Oh, Mrs. Nixon and I are very happy to receive this gift." I am sure this dear old woman went to her grave believing she had met the Vice President of the U.S.! The next day at the Embassy, we showed the "rushes" of the films of the Vice President and Mrs. Nixon's programs of the previous day. One of the officers, upon viewing Mrs. Nixon's visit to USIS, called out "What the hell was Nixon doing at USIS when he should have been out in a rice field!" He had made the same mistake as the little old lady!

USIS Role In Guaranteeing Fair Election When Magsaysay Was Elected

In the course of the program work in the Philippines, Harry Hudson was a great leader in the special program for conducting fair elections. The whole idea of it was to be tied in with the election campaign of President Magsaysay who was then Secretary of Defense. USIS conducted a program throughout all of the Philippines where we had massive amounts of materials on how to conduct a free and fair election. Later Harry told me after the whole thing was over, "Well, I guess you noticed the timing of this program was very closely related to what Mr. Magsaysay was doing and the activities of Colonel Lansdale. And that's when I got to know about and to meet Colonel Lansdale during those heady days. (He was the real Captain Hillandale of "The Ugly American.") (Harry Reasoner was with USIS then and attended Gene Schnell's Friday night spaghetti bashes for USIS staff.)

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Q: Bernie, you were in Cebu back in 1957 and then the call came to go to Korea.

LAVIN: Right.

To Korea In 1957

Q: That precipitated a stay of two, three years? How long?

LAVIN: Well, it was supposed to be a two year tour. But as things turned out two years went into three years, into four years. And then the next thing you know we were in Korea for nine years all together. It was during those nine years that what I considered to be one of the most significant USIS programs was developed beginning in 1961.

The Adaptation And Use OF The Columbia University Developed "Citizenship Education Program" (CEP) In Korean School System As Means Of Introducing Democratic Concepts Into Korean Society

In all of USIS programs that I have ever been associated with there has always been one objective that is common to all country plans—and that is the development of democratic concepts and democratic traditions, particularly in developing countries as well as in developed countries.

Of course, in Korea we had such an objective—the development of a democratic tradition and democratic concepts. Well, it was always very difficult to try to address this objective, and I suppose we had more difficulty with this than any other objective in the country plan.

In the short term there were things that we could do. But it was the long term haul that we had to think about and how to influence the course of democratic development in Korea. That, in my view, was the real issue.

Q: Wasn't this quite a change too going from the Philippines where you'd been, Manila and Cebu, and they more or less schooled in the ways of democracy under our tutelage. And

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then going to Korea which had just become independent with the end of World War. Did that play a role in it at all?

LAVIN: Oh, absolutely, and particularly in the kind of society that Korea has had since ancient times and probably will have for thousands of years more—the Confucian kind of stratified society where everyone from the oldest living member of the family down to the last daughter-in-law (who gets all the dirty jobs to do in the house). Everyone has a position of seniority, rank, responsibility and status—from high to low. To try to develop democratic concepts in terms that we are familiar with was the great challenge in Korea. I saw it as an educational process that had to be initiated if we were going to be successful over the long term.

In 1959, we had a visit from Dr. Winfield Niblo who was then a professor at Columbia University Teacher's College. He visited Korea under what we then called the Smith-Mundt program. He described to us the materials that had been developed at Teacher's College under a grant from the Carnegie Foundation. It was called the Citizenship Education Program (CEP) [Interested persons will find a more generalized discussion of the CEP Project in the interview of Earl Wilson for this USIA Oral History Project.] to be used in the American school system.

They were very impressive materials indeed. It was Hunt Damon who set up a meeting between Dr. Niblo and members of the Ministry of Education, and he described to them what these materials meant. Well, there was no reaction whatsoever because they had no idea really of what Professor Niblo was talking about. So he left after about two weeks and the whole thing just sort of fell dead. Hunt Damon turned the materials over to me and said, “Bernie, you take charge of these and see what you can do.”

Well, as I studied them I realized that this was a magnificent research task that had been done by Columbia and that if this were implemented in the school system in the United States they would really have a wonderful program for developing civic values among

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young students. So I proposed to Hunt Damon that perhaps what we could do was try to get these materials Koreanized first of all.

Q: In Korean (Hangul), in their own language.

LAVIN: Yes—and within the cultural concepts that the Koreans could understand—because some of the examples that we used in the American school system would not be understandable to Koreans. I proposed that we try to get these into the Korean educational system. But in order to do that we faced an almost insuperable job because the Korean educational system (as was the Japanese) was impregnable to any kind of outside influence in content, particularly in something like moral education. Both in Japan and in Korea, moral education was a very, very sensitive question indeed. To both the Koreans and Japanese, citizenship education meant “moral education.” [At the end of World War II, moral education which had been taught in Japan (and Korea) was repudiated because it had been misused to foster militarism and Emperor worship.]

The important thing was to select some kind of a cosponsor who could help us get these materials “Koreanized” and into the Korean educational system. I examined exhaustively schools of education, educational research groups and institutions throughout Korea. Finally the selection came down to what was then called the Central Education Research Institute. We referred to it as CERI. As it turned out, the director of that institute had received his Ph.D. in education from Teacher's College, Columbia. And so he was very familiar with the whole idea. His name was Dr. Paik Hyun-ki.

We told him we would put the resources of USIS behind this concept if he would endorse it and work with us on the Korean side and get the Ministry of Education to understand what we were trying to do. He agreed. And it was at that point that we decided to take the fundamental concepts of the citizenship education materials and get them “Koreanized” and into the Korean language.

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The Democratic Concepts

Now, very briefly what were the concepts? The “democratic concepts,” boiled down from the massive Columbia materials directly to cultural structures within Korean society. There were five.

A. The Dignity And Worth Of The Individual

The first was, the “dignity and worth of the individual.”

Now, this concept was so important because dignity, of course, is ingrained in Korean in the Confucian system—but along with it goes the idea of superiority and inferiority. We took that first concept and here is how we handled it. For instance, as an example, we took a newspaper clipping from the Hanguk Ilbo and in that clipping it reported that on such and such a date, Miss Kim, a maid living up in one part of the City of Seoul, was beaten by a certain man because she owed him 200 won. We left the story unfinished (using the problem solving technique of the citizenship education program at Columbia University). We left the solution to the teacher and the students as they would have dialogue back and forth. In the teacher's guide we put in ideas like why did that man beat the maid? Because she owed him 200 won? (200 won was a very small amount of money.) Well, it turns out that the reason he beat her is because she was only a maid and he felt he had higher status. And we noted that in a democratic society no matter who you are, you have your rights as individuals and as equals. Well, that's one way we handled the kinds of concepts that were included in the course content.

B. Taking Responsibility

The second concept was “taking responsibility”.

C. Cooperation And Community Service

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The third one was “cooperation and community service.” Now, this was pretty difficult for Koreans to grasp in terms that we understand. They cooperate as family units. But when it came to—

Q: But not in the community.

LAVIN: Yes, not in the community. They fight like hell you see. Well, that was another basic idea.

D. Care For The Handicapped

The fourth one was “care for the handicapped.” Now, in our country the handicapped have been looked on in a certain way. And in recent years, well, there's been great attention and care devoted to the handicapped as equal members of society. That's a wonderful thing and should prevail in any society, particularly a democratic society. In Korea we noticed, many of us, that Koreans would tend to laugh at, and scorn handicapped people. So we put that one in as a basic idea.

E. Choosing Good Leaders

And the last concept, was the one that was the most difficult to handle. “Choosing good leaders.” That gets you into elections and national and local politics.

Well, when we discussed all these things with the Korean professors that we finally selected as a core group, one of them, Professor Chung Bum Mo who is one of Korea's outstanding educators, and looked on as sort of the dean of educators today, said to me before we started the seminar system, which I'll describe in a couple of minutes. “Do you realize what this program is going to do? It's going to revolutionize the Korean education system—because you're taking a system which is essentially vertical in nature under the Confucian system and turning it to horizontal where responsibility and rights fall equally

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across the spectrum of society. This is going to be very difficult to do.” “But if it happens,” he said, “It will be a wonderful thing.”

Q: Bernie, I'm sure one of the things necessary in this program is finally getting the Koreans to be responsive to it. What I'm curious about is what kind of support did you get from the Washington and the Agency on this from the beginning all the way through?

LAVIN: I'm sure I can say that there was great enthusiasm both in Washington and certainly at the post, after the usual skeptical questions. The Columbia University materials gave us a very solid educational foundation on which to build. And when it became clear what the intention was and that we planned on using a fair amount of our resources for a long period of time in seminars and other kinds of programs, our support colleagues said it's worth it.

Now, one question that came up was what about AID? Why don't they do it? Well, I had talked to the AID representatives in Seoul and they were fully in support of it. Their reaction was, “We wish we could do it. But we are so occupied taking care of rebuilding Korean schoolrooms throughout the country and trying to acquire textbooks that it's impossible for us to take it on. It is the prime work of the United States government to do this sort of thing.” Thus USIA became the action-oriented group and with support from Washington certainly everybody at post got into the programming on this.

Q: So you sort of went hand-in-hand with AID on this too. While they were working on the textbooks and rebuilding schools, you had this program that—

LAVIN: We were doing the content, right. After we got the full commitment of the CERI and USIS and Washington, we decided we would start off the process by bringing together the best educators in Korea, not only from Seoul but from the provincial areas also. And so it was decided that in July of 1961 we would hold the first seminar at the Haeinsa Buddhist Temple in the Taegu region. The reason I selected a Buddhist temple site was to emphasize to the Korean educators (and the American staff) that the educational process

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of democratization was a Korean task, not an American task. And as fortune would have it in May of 1961 the coup d'etat took place where General Park Chung Hee took over the government. And believe me, it was a very authoritarian and military government. Dr. Paik Hyun-ki, the Director of the CERI said to me, "Oh, I think we're going to have to postpone this because the military government would never allow a program like this to go on. Under martial law, it is impossible to hold any meetings."

Q: Yeah. It could almost be considered subversive.

LAVIN: That's right. I said, "Well, it's either now or never. If we don't do it now we're never going to do it." So we proceeded with the plan and we ended up with a group of about 60 educators at Haeinsa Temple. The morning of the opening session came and Dr. Paik and Dr. Chung Bum Mo both came to me in a state of high excitement. They said "We're going to have to cancel this whole thing." I asked, "Why?" They answered, "There is a Korean Army general and a member of the KCIA sitting out there waiting for the session to start." And they added, "We can't have them at the meeting." I said, "Why not?—this will be an education for them and they'll see that we are not subversive." So that argument prevailed and we went ahead with the program. And sure enough at the noontime the two generals and the KCIA official joined us for lunch and then disappeared because they could see it was an educational program and not a meeting of subversives. So we carried on. And it was determined by the whole group that we would Koreanize all of the materials that would be selected out of the Columbia University materials.

Q: This would be done locally too in Korea.

LAVIN: Yes, In Korea. And the Koreans themselves who were at the seminar would do basic research and implementation. We also agreed and they agreed that they would become sort of "pointers" for the program in their areas. And this became very important for the future developments. It was also decided that we would develop what we called the

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“Teacher's Manual” so that this manual could be used by teachers on the elementary, the middle and high school levels and later we developed one for the university also.

The plan was to put this teacher's manual into the hands of teachers all over Korea. We knew that the Ministry of Education would never allow any new courses to be instituted without their full approval, most particularly in moral education. We decided to publish the manual as a supplementary textbook for teachers to use in their moral education courses. This was very well received by the Korean teachers because many of them told us privately that they were responsible for teaching moral education, and that they really didn't know what to teach.

“What we do,” they said, “is to get quotations from Confucius, George Washington and Lincoln, as well as leaders all over the world and call it moral education.” So when they had something available to them that used a system of teaching democratic concepts involving problem solving and dialogue between the teachers and the students, they said, “This would be very useful indeed”.

Q: Did you get any media reaction on this? Anything in the newspapers or on radio or television about this program?

LAVIN: No, and we really didn't want it. The papers noted, of course, that educational meetings were being held and how many professors were there and that sort of thing. But we didn't want a lot of attention until the program was organized and ready to be put into the system to the extent possible.

Well, we got to that point where we had a teacher's manual ready. I guess it was around 1963 or so. And we published in Korean 75,000 of these teachers manuals. Well, by this time the Ministry of Education was fully aware of what we were doing. And one day they sent over word that the Minister of Education, who was a good friend of ours, was so appreciative of this kind of work that he asked that his picture and his message be put into the manual. This was a very touchy question and I said to Dr. Paik and the Ministry

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officials, that we really couldn't do this—because, God knows, he may die in two weeks or he may be out of office in four weeks and then we're left with something that's useless because it would have too much of his stamp on it. So I proposed that what we would do is have his picture and message as a sort of insert. And that's the way it worked out.

Q: So it could be shaken out.

LAVIN: Shaken out very easily. Well, as luck would have it, I think it was about two months later and the Minister was out of office. So the book went throughout the school system and I have to tell you that after I went back to Korea in 1981 on my second tour, when I went down to Taegu, one of the professors who started off this program with us back in 1961, had by then in part because of his work in citizenship education become President of the Taegu Teacher's College. And he very proudly brought me into his office. He showed me the books that had been developed under this program. And he said, "I still have the Teacher's Manual and I still use it." That was very good to know.

To make a very long story short, the 60 professors who worked with us in 1961 and following became resource persons with USIS support for seminars at the USIS offices in Taegu, Pusan and Kwangju and at Korean schools. We held quarterly seminars to discuss the results and identify problems.

We discovered in later years that as a result of these professors' participation in CEP, (they came in contact with thousands upon thousands of Korean educators) their reputations were enhanced. In my second, tour (1981-86), one of them, Dr. Kim Ran Soo, who eventually obtained his Ph.D. in the U.S., said that there is no question in his mind that he became Dean of the College of Education of Yonsei University because he became so well known through his writings and books that he published on citizenship education and by meeting educators all over the country. Dr. Lee Yung Duck from Seoul National University became very well known. He was selected to head the Korean delegation to conduct negotiations with North Korea in 1984-86.

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There is another, of many examples, of the effects of the CEP in Korea. The successor of the CERI is the KEDI (Korean Educational Development Institute). It has a staff of 200 U.S. trained Ph.D's. The head of it was, when I left Korea in 1986, Professor Hong Won Soon. He was one of those 60 "Young Turks" that we started with back in 1961. When I went back to Korea in 1981 he invited me out to the KEDI and he informed his staff that they were now a multi-million dollar institute because AID has given a great deal of support to the idea of KEDI and also Florida State University. In fact, KEDI became the educational research arm of the Ministry of Education. And Professor Hong told his staff, "Had it not been for the development of the citizenship education program in Korea starting in 1961, we would not exist today."

USIS Help In Promoting Normalization Of Korean Relations With Japan: A USIS Instigated Korean Student Visit To Japan Overcomes Obstacles And Proves Enormously Effective

I would like to relate the history of a short term program that was very effective. In the 1963-65 period, President Park Chung Hee's military authoritarian government had realized that it was in Korea's long term interest to normalize relations with Japan. There was much anti-Japanese feeling in Korea, particularly during the days of President Syngman Rhee who made sure that the students were taught in school to hate the Japanese for all the terrible things they had done, particularly in the period of annexation from 1910 - 1945.

Thus when President Park announced that he intended to normalize relations with Japan there were very large and violent demonstrations led by university students. Our ambassador at the time was Winthrop Brown. One day he called the senior officers together. I was Cultural Affairs Officer by that time. And Ambassador Brown said, "I want you all to understand that I consider it to be absolutely essential that President Park should succeed in normalizing relations with Japan. It will have benefits for all of us—Koreans,

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Japanese and Americans. Any idea that you come up with that is reasonable I will fully support.”

I consulted with the PAO and proposed that since the main opposition to normalization was coming from university students who knew little or nothing about the Japanese except what they had been taught, what would be useful and, I thought, effective would be to send perhaps 50 college student editors to Japan for a one or two week tour and let them see the reality outside their own country and meet Japanese university students.

At that time, this was an unheard of proposal because there were no relations between Japan and Korea. Many people thought that this would be something that couldn't be accomplished. But I talked to representatives at the Ministry of Education and they thought it was a fine idea. But they said the big problem would be how to convince the Japanese to give visas to the Korean students. With Ambassador Brown's approval and the PAO's approval and encouragement, I made a visit to Japan to talk to our staff there to try to explain to them what we had in mind and to get an appointment at the Japanese Ministry of Education.

Well, I'll tell you some of the background on this even though some of my colleagues who are now retired may say, “Hey, let me tell my side of the story.” Well, when I explained the project to the PAO and the CAO, they were less than enthusiastic. As a matter of fact, they were down right angry. They advised me in no uncertain terms to just pack my bags and get back to Korea. The CAO told me it was impossible for Korean students to visit Japanese universities. He noted that, for example, USIS officers were not allowed to visit Tokyo University and surely Korean students would never be allowed to do so. This was quite incredible to me and I refused to believe it. My belief was strengthened when one of the senior Japanese USIS staff members told me that he could arrange for me or any other American staffer to visit Tokyo University. I realized that I was in dangerous waters.

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After two days of being “blockaded” by the PAO (who was in the middle) and the CAO who somehow, I think, saw his turf invaded, my scheduled date of departure arrived. I was determined not to leave Japan until I had exhausted every avenue of approach. One can imagine my astonishment when the CAO and the Asia Foundation representative showed up at my hotel to “take me to the airport and wish me a happy trip home!!”Q: That was the Bernie's rush rather than the bum's rush.

LAVIN: Yes. So I told them “I am not going back to Korea until this thing gets to be an accomplished fact. And I said, “If I have to go out on my own and do it, I'll do it.” Well, thank God, Hank Gosho was in Tokyo as Information Officer and I explained this whole thing to him as he puffed on his really stinking cigars. He thought it was a really neat idea. And he said, “You want to meet somebody at the Ministry?” And I said, “Sure.” Well, he got the PAO's approval who was still kind of unhappy about this. Hank and I went over to see the head of the Northeast Asian Affairs Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His reaction was instantaneous. He said, “This is a wonderful idea. I will assure you that you will get the 50 visas without any question.” “But” he said, “on one condition. There can be no public announcement of any kind that this has the blessing of the Japanese government. We will just issue the visas.”

Upon returning to Seoul, I consulted with our military colleagues in Korea at the Eighth Army. I said, “We have to have an excuse to get these students to Japan and the excuse can't be that they go to Japanese universities because there will be a lot of public questions about that. Can you arrange for these students to visit the Stars and Stripes in Tokyo for one hour and then turn them loose?” They replied, “Sure.” So that's the way it came out. The Ministry of Education in Korea selected the 50 students around the country. And, of course, the students were all thrilled to be able to go to Japan to see the “hated enemy”.

Thus we had the plane load of them go over. They were very highly selected, very intelligent, well informed students. They visited Stars and Stripes, had their one hour over

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there and enjoyed it. And the next thing you know they were off to Tokyo University and throughout the country, down to Kyoto to visit universities and the cultural and historical areas.

By this time the North Koreans were so furious that they were sending their agents around to the rooms of the students in the Prince Hotel in Tokyo and trying to get them to defect to North Korea. Well, anyway the Korean students went back to Korea. The articles that they wrote in the college newspapers were astounding to everybody, to the public, to professors, and to the students. They were saying things like "We thought that Japan got rich off us because of the Korean War, but the Japanese are rich because they worked damned hard." One of the law students of Seoul National University fell in love with a Japanese girl and I had a love-sick student on my hands for weeks.

Well, the Ministry of Education was pleased by this effort. The National Assembly was so pleased that they summoned the Minister of Education to a special meeting at the National Assembly. And they asked "How did this thing come about?" The Minister, to our great pleasure, said "It was my idea. I organized this whole thing."

Well, the next thing we know is that the Korean government funded, as I remember, about 300 or 350 additional students to visit Japan, with the same result every time. They came back and wrote very positive things. The normalization of relations went through. But a great deal of the resistance to the idea had already diminished and many in the Korean government credited this project.

Q: Yeah, because you started at the student level which is where you were going to have the problem to begin with.

LAVIN: Which is where the problem was. They were the ones leading the demonstrations. A lot of the older people felt that even though they hated the Japanese for what they did to Korea, they came to respect the Japanese as their teachers. But they couldn't dare

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mention that in public because the Koreans would say, "Oh, you're Japanese lovers." The teacher-student bond in Asia transcends nationalism, often.

Q: *Yeah.*

LAVIN: So that was a very, very interesting period. The Ambassador was happy with the results and the PAO and everyone else involved. I should note here that in the revolution against Syngman Rhee in 1960, Ministry of Education officials were stoned by university students. There was just no communication between them. Yet here, in this program, two Korean Ministry of Education officials who accompanied the students to Japan as "government chaperons" became fast friends with the students as both the officials and the students assured me in a "debriefing" upon return to Korea. That was one where there was a short term gain for the U.S. that could be identified.

Q: *Yeah.*

Lavin Is Dragooned Into Job As East Asia Foreign Service Personnel Officer At Height Of Demands For Officers For JUSPAO, Vietnam - 1967

Q: *Bernie, when you told me you had 15 years in the field without a Washington assignment, I could only think of one other person that I know of who's done that and that was Don Rochlen. How did you accomplish that? And then what did you think after you got to Washington?*

LAVIN: When I was assigned to Washington in 1967, I knew I was going to my first hardship post, a real hardship post, thanks to Russ Cox who visited me in Cebu.

In late 1956 Russ Cox, Personnel Officer for the Far East, visited us in Cebu. Poor Russ was exhausted by his travels and we invited him to stay with us. Only a year before we had been lucky to rent a lovely house on the ocean from the Mayor of Cebu. I drove Russ from Cebu out to our ocean front home. Russ was still in his Washington duds—coat,

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tie, etc. and all very warm. We stretched him out on the lanai in a wicker lounge chair, loosened his tie, took his heavy coat and gave him a glass of scotch that would electrify an electric eel. After a while, as the moon rose from half way around the world, and the torrid sun flashed in its sinking on the fleets of shining, jumping fish, Russ said, "You know, for years, we have been sitting back there in Washington feeling sorry for poor Bernie Lavin out there all alone in Cebu. Just wait until I get back there!" I knew we had made a mistake. We should have left him in a third rate hotel in Cebu. In six months we had orders for Korea. Moral: If you have a nice house, don't invite a personnel officer!

When I got to D.C. the desk job which I had hoped to get in the East Asian area was already filled and there was no chance for me.

Dan Herget was Personnel Officer for the Far East and was looking around frantically for somebody to replace him.

Q: And Herget was on his way to Vietnam, wasn't he?

LAVIN: He was on his way to another assignment. But anyway, one day Ken Coffey, who was Director of Foreign Service Personnel, called me in and said, "I would like you to be Personnel Officer for East Asia." My reply, "I have no experience. I don't know anything about personnel. This is completely out of my area of expertise. I would be a terrible personnel officer. And so I have to say, sorry, I can't do it." His reply, "I'll give you two weeks to think about it." And within two weeks I was Personnel Officer. And Dan Herget handed over that famous black book which has on one side of the page names of officers, and on the other, openings in the next six months.

Well, Dan Herget went and I came. One of the first telephone calls that came in as I sat in that hot seat was from Seattle. The USIA staffer said, "I'm sitting here waiting for somebody to tell me what to do. What should I do?" And I answered, "Well, I just got into this chair and I'm waiting for somebody to tell me what to do."

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In Personnel I found that the other personnel officers in most cases were old hands at this. They were civil service representatives. And they had years and years and years of experience. They knew where all the skeletons were. They knew all the tricks of the trade.

Q: Now, most of them in those days were not foreign service.

LAVIN: I was, I think, at that time, the only Foreign Service staffer. Well, in these weekly meetings, I would see careers being traded up and down the table just like that, like cards being dealt out. And I sat there like a jerk. And I thought, "Where do I learn"? "Who are the good ones?" "Who are the bad ones?" I wondered how often my name had been up and down that table.

After several months I finally began to catch on. What made it very difficult at the time is that it was only a one person job. There was only one Personnel Officer for East Asia. No assistants.

Q: And that was a time when we were sending all kinds of people out to Vietnam among other places.

LAVIN: We had 110 positions in Vietnam alone to keep filled and 300 positions area-wide to keep filled. And I found myself scratching all over the place. If VOA planned to close Monrovia, the next thing you'd know I'd be grabbing those names and looking at them for possible service in Vietnam. It was a very difficult time. And I guess during my time of 2 # years there were very promising young officers who refused to go to Vietnam. We had to accept there resignations. That was very difficult to do.

Q: They didn't get another post.

LAVIN: No, if they turned down Vietnam they were invited out of USIA in some way. I regretted the loss of promising talent. At the end of the 2 # years as Personnel Officer

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I was convinced that I had a heart condition because of the daily crises that came up. Working with Area Director Dan Oleksiw was no vacation.

Q: Double tension. Oleksiw and the personnel job, huh?

LAVIN: As Personnel Officer, I found myself getting home almost every night that he was in town at 9:30, 10:00 o'clock at night.

Q: Which must have been great for your home life.

LAVIN: After one year my wife said, "Is all of this necessary? Every weekend you're getting calls from Vietnam. You're getting calls from every place. We have no life at all." I said, "It's very important. We have to do it." And so she stuck it out and I stuck it out. With but three months left in my assignment as Personnel Officer, Lionel Mosley called me in and said, "I would really like to ask you to do something special before you leave. You have three months before you go. I'd like you to spend a lot of your time trying to figure out how to reform the personnel system." I replied, "I'll be glad to do that." So I interviewed everybody I could find. Everyone who had been personnel officer in the civil service system or foreign service who had anything to do with the USIA, was interviewed.

I talked with Kitty Jones, for example, because of her long experience and I searched out retired officers and civil servants to get the best advice from them. I presented the plan to Mr. Mosley. The plan essentially said that under the present system it is virtually impossible for one personnel officer to do all the career counseling, all of the long range planning, all of the language assignments years ahead of time, take care of all the day to day personnel crises resulting e.g. from illness of the officer or a member of his or her family, react to changes in assignments required by the area and be fair to all involved and to the Agency.

I proposed that there be a division of personnel responsibilities. The Personnel Officer would be operationally responsible, including the changing of assignments, for a six-month

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period in the future. The long range planning of assignments and careers would be done by Career Counselors with the mandatory provision that the Career Counselors would have to be selected from the Agency's finest officers. Then I presented a list of 35 officers to Mr. Mosley who might be.....

Q: Career counselors, huh?

LAVIN: Career Counselors. And up towards the top of the list, if not the top, I had Stan Moss. When he found out that his name was on that list, he almost killed me. He Said, "It's the last G.D. thing I want." Well, anyway he was appointed Chief, Career Counseling, and I was not killed. But essentially the system that I presented to Mr. Mosley was what the Agency adopted. As to the extent that it's been changed through the years since 1969 I'm not exactly sure. But the basic plan was put into effect when I left in 1969 and continues to this day, as far as I know.

Q: Bernie, if you had it to do over again, would you recommend that an officer go to Washington early on in his career or later on?

LAVIN: The later the better. However, let me explain. There must be a balance between the "Washington orientation" and the "overseas orientation". It is not difficult to become a "client of Washington." It is not difficult to become a "client of the host country." One of the most difficult decisions a Foreign Service Officer can make (even though he or she may not be aware of the choice) is how to give the highest priority to the interests of the U. S. while maintaining harmonious or stable relations with the host country. I found it most difficult to deal with the mentality of colleagues in State and USIA who operated on the principle "Don't make the host country angry." Too many American interests have been sacrificed to that principle in the name of "friendship".

Q: Bernie, it seems to me that you managed to get out of Washington after only two years there after all that time away. And your next post was Nigeria. You want to talk about that?

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DPAO Nigeria, LAVIN: 1970

LAVIN: Actually three and a half years. Nigeria was a very interesting assignment but very difficult. Nigeria, for all the great promise that it held in terms of democratic development, was an economic mess. And corruption was just unbelievable. Living conditions were kind of tough but in terms of the program I felt very rewarded even though I only stayed one year because of an illness in the family. I had to go back to Washington.

But during that one year, Jack Shellenberger was PAO and I was Deputy and Executive Officer at the same time. When I left I recommended that it is not possible for a deputy and an executive officer position to be put together because they are two entirely different ways of approaching things.

But anyway, as the Deputy I proposed working with Phil Cohen on a seminar on excellence in education for the university system. It was held at the University of Ibadan. And it came off wonderfully well. We had Nigeria's top educators there. And as a matter of fact, the Federal Minister of Education gave his full cooperation and support to this program. That had not happened before in anybody's recollection. And I looked on that as a very great accomplishment for USIS because it identified us with the educational movement and development in Nigeria which was trying desperately to improve its educational system and has done rather well I would say in the years.

1971 - Illness Forces Return To Washington: Assignment As Deputy Executive Director Board Of Examiners, Department of State

Q: Bernie, after Nigeria you had to go back to Washington, and you ended up at the Board of Examiners. You want to tell us a little bit about your time there?

LAVIN: Yes, that was really a very challenging time. Lionel Mosley asked me to be what was called at the time the Deputy Executive Director of the Board of Examiners over at the Department of State. The Board of Examiners is the agent for conducting the examination

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system for young men and women to enter the Foreign Service, whether in the State Department track or the USIA track.

During the time that I was there, and I value this as one of my great experiences, we interviewed the finest young people that the United States has to offer in terms of intellectual capacity, breadth of understanding and just sheer brains and it was always a great pleasure to interview these young people.

Q: Did you do that in Washington? Or did you travel around the country interviewing them?

LAVIN: We did that in Washington mainly but some teams traveled through the U. S. At one point when I was in Personnel there was a lateral entry group that I was appointed to. We traveled to Africa and Latin America conducting interviews for those already in the service to convert over to the career service. But at the Board of Examiners we conducted the interviews for those who passed the written foreign service examination.

For candidates of the State Department there would be two interviewers from State and one from USIA. For the USIA candidates there would be two from USIA and one from State on the panel.

While I was there many efforts were made by the various directors, the executive directors of the State Department at the Board of Examiners to improve the examination system so that we would get a better kind of candidate who was not only brilliant and analytical and had all of the qualities that one looks for in the Foreign Service, but who also could work effectively in foreign situations. It was found that quite often very capable young people would not be able to work within situations or cultures in developing countries that were foreign to them and they had difficulty accepting the way things were.

Many efforts were made working with Dr. McClellan from Harvard and the testing agency that actually developed the written examination to try to come up with a better system. That's why many young officers will remember the in-box system where the candidate

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instead of just being interviewed by three panelists would be asked to handle in-box situations. In that way we hoped to get to a better kind of candidate, better suited for the Foreign Service. Those were very heady times where we all had to undergo different examinations that were produced. We had to go on closed circuit TV and be interviewed and see what our capacity was as interviewers.

I remember the shock that I got when my turn came to be interviewed by Dr. McClellan and his staff. I always thought in my mind as I appeared before the candidates that I was looking pleasant and relaxed because you're supposed to try to do that in this modern day and age, i.e., make the candidate feel relaxed at the beginning of the interview. Well, I was shocked when I saw myself on TV. I looked like an ogre and I was scowling. And I thought how sorry I felt for those poor kids, who had come before me for interviews when I thought I was being so pleasant. So there was a great deal of self revelation about how one acted as an interviewer. As we took a lot of these exams ourselves we found out how much we knew and how much we didn't know and it was—yes, a revelation.

But anyway, I considered that to be one of the very important times in my life. The assignments as Personnel Officer and later at the Board of Examiners over at State were very meaningful for me.

Senior Seminar Year

I was very lucky to be one of the candidates in USIA for the Senior Seminar. And that will remain in my memory as one of the great years of my life when I really got to see the United States the way it is, warts and all. The Senior Seminar program was a marvelous contribution to development and training the younger officers. We saw many parts of the United States. We talked with people like Henry Kissinger, Patrick Moynihan, mayors of the various cities throughout the United States, governors, engineers, scientists, journalists, members of Congress. And it was truly an educational experience par excellence.

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So all and all I would say my Washington assignments were ideal for me and I look back on them as most rewarding. So even though I said things in this interview to indicate that Washington was a kind of hardship, in many ways it was, but I think it was also one of the great periods of my life that I'll look back on with pride appreciation and some anguish!

Q: Before we get off the Senior Seminar Bernie, as I recall in each Senior Seminar each participant has a chance to visit one or more foreign countries and prepare a paper at the end of that Senior Seminar. You want to tell us about your paper and the country you visited.

LAVIN: Yes, this was a dream of any Foreign Service Information Officer's lifetime. We were given the opportunity to select a number of countries provided it was within budget. Because of my great interest in citizenship education and the program that had been developed in Korea, I was interested to find out how moral education, citizenship education, or what you will call it, might be conducted in other countries.

Since it was the home of democracy in human history, I selected Greece. Nigeria, El Salvador and Thailand were included also. I sent questionnaires to the various Ministries of Education months before I took the trip so that I could have a data base of information to work on and a point of contact with these various ministries. That worked out very well, because when I visited those countries they knew what I was up to.

Q: And it wasn't a surprise for them?

LAVIN: It was no surprise. They readily cooperated. And I wrote my paper. It has been referred to any number of times through the years by USIS officers. A program was held at Tufts University, the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy on citizenship education as I had described it not only in Korea but in the countries that I visited. I considered that to be a very worthwhile thing, not only for myself, but for the Agency also.

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After Senior Seminar, Indonesia Preceded By Nine Months Of Language Training

Q: Bernie, I think your next stop after the Senior Seminar was Jakarta. Do you want to tell us about that?

LAVIN: Yes, first I went to the Foreign Service Institute in Arlington to have the nine months of Indonesian language training. I remember a very embarrassing incident before I went there. On my own, while I was at the Board of Examiners, I decided that I was going to learn French at the FSI in the early morning French classes. So for two years I did that. And I will never forget those wintry mornings when I had to get up at five o'clock, have breakfast and dash over to the FSI for the class that started at 7:30 in the morning while it was still dark out. At the end of the two years I managed to get a "3-3" in French. I felt pretty good about that.

Then I was assigned to the Indonesian language class. We had wonderful teachers. During the first week the program was nothing but Indonesian. You didn't speak a word of English if at all possible. Well, at the end of one week, it had been drilled into me and I was thinking in Indonesian. One afternoon I got on a bus going from Arlington over to the State Department and whom did I meet on the bus but one of my former French language instructors, and he started speaking to me in French. I had talked very easily with him in French a couple of weeks before. But all that would come out of me was Indonesian. And I was very embarrassed. I said, "Oh, Professor Mornu, excusez moi." I could hardly say anything to him in French. He laughed and he said, "Oh, it's very understandable; that happens often when you switch from studying one language to the other."

But anyway, the one year of language training at FSI was wonderful. And I was fortunate to score "3+-3+" in Indonesian. And my wife who took the course with me scored a "3-3". I was told by the teachers that at that time no wife who had taken the course had scored a "3-3". So I was very proud of her. The language was so utterly important in our work in Indonesia.

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And it's one reason why I loved the assignment as Deputy and the PAO there. Two weeks after I arrived in Jakarta, I had a staff meeting of all the Indonesian staff. I said, "We've all had a chance to get to know each other and you know what I'm like and I have some idea of what you're like. The U. S. government invested a lot of money in me and the study of the Indonesian language. And so beginning from today until the day I leave Indonesia, you and I will conduct all of our business in Indonesian only." Well, this surprised the staff. After the meeting the radio assistant came up to me and said, "Mr. Lavin, this is very unfair of you to insist on Indonesian being spoken." And I said, "Why?" He answered, "Well, we are trying to improve our English." I said, "How many Americans are there on the USIS staff here besides myself?" And he replied, "Eleven." I asked, "How many Americans are there in the Embassy?" And he said, "Oh, I guess 90 or so." And I said, "That's right; you have all of those people to practice your English with. With me it's Indonesian." And so in fact we conducted most of our business in Indonesian. And I will never forget that. That's why Indonesia has very special meaning for me because I feel that we received insights into the Indonesian culture that not many foreigners were able to get because they didn't have the language. I made a "contact project" out of the Institute of Technology at Bandung which was and is a traditional source of leadership. I went there quite frequently. I especially worked with student leaders. I would go up there about every six weeks or so and meet with them. And that turned out to be one of the very worth while tasks I accomplished in Indonesia.

Q: Do you remember any special situations in which you had to use Indonesian?

LAVIN: Indeed, I will never forget one night. I had attended the language school in Bandung for a kind of a summer brush-up course. One of the teachers was one of the most radical of the Muslim leaders in the Muslim community in Bandung which is a center of the Muslim leadership community. We would often get into discussions of U. S. policy.

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One night my teacher invited me to go to the home of one of the Muslim leaders and I will never forget that. I was placed in a chair in the center of the room. And five of the Muslim leaders sat like a board of examiners—

Q: Facing you.

LAVIN: Like a panel, facing me. For three hours, in Indonesian, we discussed American foreign policy. Well, I tell you I was sweating at the end of that session. And I said to—

Q: That's a good way to get your language honed up though, huh?

LAVIN: Whew! Well, after that session I invited my teacher for a drink. Even though he was a very rabid Muslim leader who had to observe all of the rules of the Muslim religion, he loved beer. He found a way around the rule against alcohol by calling the bottle of beer an Islamic bottle—that is no alcohol! A real “hozy bottle.”

Q: Yeah.

LAVIN: I used to invite him to the Queen's Restaurant. It's a Chinese Restaurant up in Bandung. We would usually have a few beers. One problem is that whenever he had a glass of beer his face would just light up like fire.

Q: Yeah.

LAVIN: That night after we had had that three hour session with Muslim leaders, I invited him to the restaurant. And I said, “Boy, I sure need a beer after that. That's the toughest thing I ever went through in my life particularly in a foreign language.”

Well, while we were having a couple of these big bottles of beer, who should come into the restaurant but these same five Muslim leaders with their wives.

Q: Muslim leaders, huh?

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LAVIN: Yes, the ones that had “examined” me for those three hours of that session. My teacher almost fell off his chair. He quickly pushed his bottle over to me. And he said, “you're drinking too bottles.” So he couldn't have any beer until they left. He and I often had a hearty laugh over that whenever we met in later years.

There was another memorable test of my Indonesian. Pat Derian, Assistant Secretary for East Asia, visited Indonesia. She wanted to interview an Indonesian journalist who had been imprisoned by the government on Buru island for ten years. He agreed to be interviewed but would not agree to having an Indonesian interpreter. As she and the Ambassador sat in my office, I served as interpreter as Ms. Derian asked her questions. I perspired quite a bit because it was so important that I reflect questions and answers accurately.

Q: Tell me a little bit about the program in Indonesia.

LAVIN: In Indonesia we concentrated very heavily on American studies with the University of Indonesia and other universities also. And we also had a unique institution there called the Lembaga Indonesia. It's the binational center. We had a very difficult time trying to—

Q: You had two branch posts at that time, didn't you?

LAVIN: Yes. We had Medan and Surabaya.

Q: Medan is right across from Penang practically.

LAVIN: That's right. With regard to the Lembaga Indonesia, it was in effect a binational center. But how to fit a binational center into a country plan was always the big problem. Well, it turns out that the Lembaga went its own way as I understand it. And today the Lembaga has practically nothing to do in any direct contact with USIS in Indonesia. Its main activity became English language training.

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Q: And you had an American probably as director of it, didn't you?

LAVIN: Yes, we did.

Q: In the beginning. But that job was done away with.

LAVIN: There is no USIS American director now as far as I know.

PAO - South Africa

Q: South Africa is a long way from Asia, but there may be some similarities. Do you want to tell us about it?

LAVIN: Sure. South Africa is something very special in many senses of the word. First of all, how did I get there? I fully expected to go to Thailand as PAO. I had been given hints by people back in Washington that my name was at the top of the list, both the area list and personnel.

And I told my wife, let's get ready to go to Thailand because it looks like an almost sure thing. However, John Reinhardt had different ideas. He wanted to make his own assignments. I found that instead of going to Thailand I was to go to South Africa as PAO. Well, this came as a shock. I had very little idea of what South Africa was like and very little experience in the area. But off we went to South Africa.

I found it to be a very frustrating assignment but very rewarding. Why was it frustrating? Well, living in South Africa was sort of dream-like; the finest of housing, very good medical facilities, excellent food. But that was for the white segregated community in which we lived. So often in the course of our work we would go out to the black townships and see how people lived out there. That was a shattering experience.

For instance, I went out to visit a township and I asked to go to an elementary school and a high school and so forth. And a black South African friend brought me to this little

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elementary school that was a one room shack. There were no desks, no chairs. There were only long benches. There wasn't even a blackboard. There wasn't a piece of chalk. The only educational instrument that they had was about 15 or 20 bottle tops of coca cola bottles which they used for helping the children learn how to count.

In the course of my service in South Africa I tried to specialize with university students both black and white. And, of course, the university students at the segregated University of Pretoria were the most conservative of all. I met some of them, became very friendly with a few and tried to introduce them to black university students—and succeeded in a number of cases.

Frustrations Of Apartheid

One day I was talking to one white student who defended the apartheid system in South Africa. He claimed that South Africa had a separate but equal system of education and that the two societies could develop separately and freely and equally. I asked him if he had ever been to a township in South Africa? And he said, "It is against the law for any white South African to go into a township." And I commented that I had often visited them. I told him that the white segregated schools are more beautiful than I have seen in many places in the United States, magnificent campuses, excellent facilities, the finest of teachers, excellent programs, the best that any young student could ask for. I also said that I went into an elementary school in a township. I described to him what I saw there. He was silent. He had no reply. He couldn't have. He said, "Well, I haven't seen that." And I asked if he would be willing to go to a township with me and bring along some of his other student friends from the University of Pretoria. I promised to try to get the permission of the government in the visit. Well, he never went. He didn't want to—

Q: He didn't want to see it.

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LAVIN: No, he didn't want to have this image destroyed, i.e., that the blacks were enjoying the same privileges as the whites. So I found it very difficult to work between those contrasting cultures and their mutual perceptions.

Taking another example, I will never forget the night that I visited the home of a very fine black South African doctor who lives in Soweto. He had many of his friends over. We had a heck of a party. Even though I knew where his house was, because I had been there many times, I had difficulty finding it because the visibility was almost zero. Black South Africans in the ghetto use paraffin for cooking and paraffin sends up a tremendous cloud of smoke. Well, the cloud of smoke was so dense I could hardly find the house even with the headlights on in the car. As we headed for home after the party, there on the horizon was the shining, magical city of Johannesburg where the blacks are not allowed to live. A land of contrasts! The South African government prohibited foreigners from visiting townships, but the Ambassador insisted the staffers visit the townships for legitimate official reasons. I was never stopped or questioned but others were.

Anyway, in program terms it was so difficult for us to do anything to help the black South Africans and especially the students without being accused of perpetuating the white apartheid system of control of South Africa. To walk the line was very, very difficult indeed.

Lavin Succeeds In Using A Visit Of University Of California Professors To Institute Professional Exchange Arrangement Between White And Black Universities

Fortunately, we had a golden opportunity in the form of a visit from a team from the University of California headed by Professor David Ryer. They explained what they do at the University of California to help minority students. They developed a very successful tutorial system to help minority students in mathematics and science. As I introduced him around in the community, both to the white and to the black professors, we thought "Wouldn't it be wonderful, if some kind of a program like that could be developed for black

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South African students to make them more competitive, particularly in those few white universities where they were accepted in small numbers?"

Well, I talked to one of the professors at the University of Witwatersrand and described the program to him. I said that we could get a project going where white and black South African professors could develop a system based on what the University of California does. Well, we did it. We had that team go around to most of the universities, and they set their roots in every place. And I learned later that the program not only caught on but flourished. The difficulty was the Ministry of Education officials were very suspicious about what was cooking here. So we had to try to steer around the Ministry in order to get this thing done.

So the program took off and I understand that later AID became very interested in it, and many millions of dollars were made available for that program. I'm sure it has developed and grown since then because I've heard about it since that time. But those were the roots of it. What it is now I'm not exactly sure because it may have changed direction. But David Ryer and his staff will remain in my memory as having done something extraordinary in conjunction with USIS and the use of American resources without strengthening the apartheid system and yet giving an edge to many black students who wanted to get into the university and couldn't because of their lack of training in math and science.

Return To Korea As PAO: 1981

Q: Bernie, I think it was while you were still in South Africa that you heard that they were looking for a public affairs officer in Seoul.

LAVIN: Yes, exactly so. I picked up the wireless file one day and I saw the assignments list. I almost leaped out of my chair. I saw that for July 1981 they were looking for a PAO in Seoul, Korea. Well, I went running home to my wife and I said, "Guess what?", and I told her about it. And I said, "Let's put in for it." And she said, "You bet." So I called up the personnel officer in Washington and said, "Look, you don't have time to get a PAO who

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is familiar with the Korean language, who has a rating in language. I've got a "2-2" on my own without any formal training from the Agency and I picked it up an hour before work started during the years that I was in Korea. So why not consider me for that job?" And the answer was, "You have another year to go on your three year tour or two more years to go on a four year tour. And so it's impossible." And I said, "Look, all you have to do is give me a four or five month brush up in Korean and just put my name in and I'm ready to go. You want the person there in July. I will be there July 15, 1981."

About two weeks later the call came back and they said, "You know, that's pretty good planning." And that's the way it came about. And I found myself back in Korea, very happily.

It was remarkable to see all of the development that had taken place in Korea. Many of those wonderful educators that I had worked with so closely had gone on to positions of great authority. Some had become high officials in the Ministry of Education and at the Blue House (the equivalent of the White House). Some had become deans of the colleges in their universities. They had published books. They had become great scholars. And as I mentioned, Dr. Lee Yung Duck became the head of the Korean delegation for the talks with North Korea.

Lavin Targets Top Students, Forma A "Junto," A Group Of Top Students Regularly Discussing World Affairs; Contacts Pay Off In His PAO Tour As Many Of These Students Advance To High Positions In Korean Government And Society

There is one man I will never forget. I think he is the finest person I ever met in my entire life. His name was Dr. Kim Jae-ik. When I was in Korea the first time, when I was Director of the Seoul Center, I started English classes on my own time with my prime target—the most excellent students of the best universities. And I asked the Deans for the names of the best students that they could find within the liberal arts colleges and colleges of law, education, commerce and so forth. I had found in my experience and from what I knew

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about Korean history that those who go on to the highest positions in government and in business in later years are those excellent students that come from the best universities. So I targeted them.

Well, out of this one group of 90 that I taught there were about 15 who were truly extraordinary. Of the group of 15 there was one who was extraordinary beyond all the rest. He was the most intelligent, the best informed, the best read, the finest human being you would ever want to meet. And his name was Kim Jae-ik, a student from the Liberal Arts College of Seoul National University.

Well, he and I were associated as teacher and student for years. I developed a book club which eventually became The Junto. Have you ever heard of the Junto?

Q: No.

LAVIN: Benjamin Franklin said that of all of his great accomplishments in his life the most valuable to him was the formation of the Junto. He formed a group of ten of his friends, and they would meet in a pub house every Friday night and they would discuss philosophy and news over tankards of ale. This enabled him to keep his finger on what was going on in Philadelphia, and it became a lifelong association of friends and became the starting point for many of Philadelphia's finest institutions.

One of the books I assigned to this reading club that I had selected out of the best students in the English classes was the autobiography of Benjamin Franklin. One of the students reported on that and the other students showed interest in the part about the Junto. I suggested that we think about something like a Junto ourselves? And they agreed. And every Friday night as long as I was in Korea, we would meet at the USIS or at my home and we would do what Franklin did, i.e. discuss national and international affairs, philosophy, etc. We called ourselves the Junto.

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The Korean government got very curious about this Junto. (It sounded to them like Junta.) The PAO called me in one day and said, "The Korean government has leveled a charge against you that you are meeting regularly with a group of student leaders and you are inflaming them against the government." And I said, "This is ridiculous." I asked for proof of the charge. Here is what happened. We had a rule in the club that no visitors from outside could come in unless one of the members of the Junto would invite them in.

One Friday night one young lady from one of the very good universities invited in these two guys. They appeared more like thugs than friends of a college student. Well, we later learned that they were both in the Korean CIA. The young lady, a member of the Junto, later explained to me that she didn't know them but they had intimidated her before the meeting and said they would cause her much trouble if she didn't invite them in. They reported to their superiors that I was inflaming the students against the government. Well, I became concerned. I thought I could be thrown out of the country for this. And the PAO said, "This is a serious charge. How can you show proof that you didn't do this?"

Well, one of the rules that we had in the club, as Benjamin Franklin had, was that a member would write down all the minutes of what happened in the course of the meeting. That particular night we had as guest a professor, a Korean professor, who had gone to the U. S. under a U. S. grant and he had returned. He described his activities in the United States and his studies. I had the record to prove that. So then the PAO accepted that. And then I said, "Now, I want an apology from the Korean CIA because I am not going to be accused of something like that. It could be very damaging to me." And the PAO said, "Oh, forget it. It's all gone."

But now let me get back to Kim Jae-ik. I told you about the Junto. Kim Jae-ik was really stellar in the group. We all listened to his views because he was so sensible. After graduation he went on to get 2 MAs at Stanford and the University of Hawaii in economics.

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So when I got back to Korea in 1981 he had become the economic counselor to the President of the Republic of Korea.

Not long after my return he called me up one day and said, "You've been away from Korea for 14 years. I want to bring you up to date on what has happened here." So he invited me to the Lotte Hotel which is now a magnificent hotel right across from USIS. We dined in a private dining room overlooking the mountains and the City of Seoul—just the two of us. And for three hours he gave me a review of what had happened in Korea right down to that moment.

Well, I, of course, wrote all of this up in a "MemCon" because it had such interesting history of Korea's economy. At the Embassy they said this was the single most important conversation that had been recorded in their memory because Dr. Kim went into all the background on the AID program, what it meant to Korea, the recommendations that were made about won exchange rates and so forth and how dramatically U. S. politics helped Korea to "take off" economically.

Well, during the five years that I was in Korea, Dr. Kim was very helpful in some of the seminars we held such as the seminar between American businessmen and Korean government officials. The American businessmen said, "Hell, in one night at this seminar where we all got together for drinks at the end of the day we had more information exchange than since our arrival in Korea. We never had a chance to meet these officials before." Were it not for Dr. Kim, it would have been impossible to arrange such a seminar.

We held this seminar in October 1983. At the conclusion of the program we were in the bus coming from the seminar site back to Seoul. We sensed that something was wrong because people were acting strange in the streets when we got to the City of Seoul. When I got home, my wife was in tears and I too burst into tears when she told me the North Koreans had blown up the Korean presidential delegation in Burma. Dr. Kim Jae-ik was one of those killed. Well, I wept as I did for the others whom I knew in the group.

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Q: *They lost how many? Twelve or thirteen?*

LAVIN: Seventeen.

Q: *Seventeen.*

LAVIN: Yes, And they were Korea's finest people. But anyway, I had so many memories of Korea. In that personalized sense I will just never forget Korea and its people.

I ought to tell you that just before I left Korea to retire I made a recording of Korean songs. The album is called *Songs Koreans Love To Sing*. Here is how it came about. There is an old Korean custom that after dinner parties Koreans sing their favorite songs. Everyone is expected to sing a solo and some times it's hilarious. I would always listen to see what songs the Koreans sang that were most meaningful to them; songs that made Koreans cry or made them feel sentimental or nationalistic — old songs from their home towns, love songs, funny songs, songs that reached the Korean personality and national character.

I collected eleven of the songs that Koreans love to sing. A Korean publisher learned that I had translated these songs into English and suggested that a recording be made. He hired an orchestra and engaged two famous Korean female singers. The publisher insisted that I sing the English version and the girls would do the Korean. The recording session started late in the afternoon and continued to about two o'clock in the morning. But we got it done just a couple of days before I left Korea. It has been on sale in Korea and about 8,000 copies have been sold. The agreement I made with the publisher was that no money would come to me. Whatever money would normally come to me in the Korean royalty system would go to the Fulbright Commission in Seoul. So some of the budget of the Fulbright Commission in Seoul owes a small amount to that particular recording.

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And when the political counselor, Harry Dunlap, came through here in Hawaii two years ago, we spent the day together recalling all the old times. It was he who was with me for those three days and nights when the students took over the USIS in Seoul in May 1985.

Q: *Oh, yes.*

LAVIN: He told me that just before leaving Seoul to come here on vacation he and his family made a trip down to Kyoungju which is a very famous cultural site in Korea. He said that on the tourist bus they heard the recording which had been made into a tape.

Q: *Oh, that's great. Bernie, I must say that you were retired by the time the Olympics came to Korea this year. But you must have felt that that was also a culmination of a lot of effort that had been made by everybody to see that the World Olympics had come to Seoul.*

LAVIN: Oh, yes indeed. Even though we didn't have a chance to go back to Korea to be there for it, we knew it was going to be a magnificent success. The Koreans prepared so well that even two years before the Olympics were held they could have held the Olympics at the drop of a hat. They did in fact have an opening ceremony for the International Olympic Committee and many thousands of Koreans. They put on a show that was just fantastic—two years before the Olympics!!

Q: *Yeah.*

LAVIN: And I knew that it was going to be a great success. This may be a good point at which to begin to conclude this interview. The idea of hard work brings me back to the very beginning when we got to Korea in 1958. Even though everybody was poor and the clothes they wore were of very poor quality, the country was still trying to pick itself up and put itself back together again after the war. I said to my wife within the first few weeks of being in Korea, "This country and these people are going to make it. I never saw anybody in my life work as hard as the Koreans do." And hard work has paid off for the Koreans. And that's why they have what they have. If you look around the world these days, how

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many countries are still getting aid from the United States and have been getting aid for perhaps 30 years and are still basket cases? Korea doesn't get a cent of aid and they haven't since 1976. And look at what they've done.

Q: They've taken off.

LAVIN: It's just remarkable. Yes, taken off.

Stories About University Students With Whom Lavin Associated In 1950's, Their Later Rise To Prominence And Friendship For U.S.

I would like to end this interview with stories about university students since so much of my career in USIA was student related. Beginning in 1958 I made special efforts to work with Korean university students. As noted earlier in the interview I formed the Junto. The following story is a spin off related to the Junto. The historic "Korean Student Revolution" of April 1960 resulted in the overthrow of President Syngman Rhee. (I could make another amazing interview on that event to which I was an eyewitness.) In June, 1960 President Eisenhower visited Korea. He sent word ahead from Tokyo that he wanted a Korean university student to be present at a breakfast with community leaders at the Ambassador's residence. This sent the Political Section and our CIA into a tailspin. They were fearful that some wild-eyed radical could misrepresent the event to the President. I suggested to them the name of one of the Junto members from Seoul National University who was level-headed, actively participated in the revolution and was in excellent academic standing at his university. His name was Lee Tae-sup. With great relief the Political Counselor accepted Lee's name. At the breakfast President Eisenhower asked Lee to explain the student role in the April revolution. His reply—which was exactly to the point—was "Mr. President, the Korean students made it possible for the government to be put into the hands of good people." This quotation was given great publicity by the Korean media and "a star of the April revolution was born"! Lee was lionized by the press and by his peers. To this day (1989) he is remembered by Koreans as one of the

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“Korean hero students” of April 1960. He became the first Korean student to earn a Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering at MIT. He returned to Korea, became Vice President of an industrial engineering company and then went into politics and was elected to the National Assembly. While I was in Korea on my second tour he was appointed Minister for Political Affairs. He was of great help to me in many ways. Just before I retired in April 1986, we had a farewell luncheon for the Junto members, most of whom still live in Korea. We had a wonderful time but it was with heavy hearts that we remembered Kim Jae-ik who was killed in Rangoon; in a special way my heart was also heavy to leave this wonderful group and especially Lee Tae-sup. As some of them pass through Hawaii they visit me.

Going back to 1958, I told the members of the Junto that I was very eager to get to know the real student leaders of the radical group called The Mintong (MINJOK TONG-IL YONMAENG)—but that it was difficult to make contact because the students were quite anti-foreign. Through the SNU students of the Junto I eventually met the top leaders of the group. I cultivated them by meetings at my home and introduced USIS and Embassy officers into the meetings. The Korean government considered them communists but I found them to be dedicated nationalists (but I kept a wary eye out for communist leanings). I even included them in factory tour groups of university students to industrial sites which had received U. S. aid—to let the students see that Korea was in fact rebuilding after the Korean War. (Word was out among many students that “things were better in North Korea.”) On one memorable factory tour I found that the most hot-headed radical of the Mintong had detached himself from the group and was handing out leaflets to the factory workers. I quickly got him back under control.

In the year of chaos that followed the April revolution, the Mintong was among the most active groups that resisted the weak rule of Chang-nyun. The top leader of the group was a student by the name of Yoon-sik. It was he who concocted the idea of organizing a Korean group of 10,000 students to march on Panmunjom to negotiate reunification with their Korean brothers. That ridiculous idea gave General Park Chung-hee the excuse he needed for a coup and in May 1961, he took over the government in a military coup.

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Yoon-sik and his buddies were imprisoned. I was so convinced that the students were not communists that I asked for the PAO and Ambassador to approve my visit to the prison to see Yoon-sik. My rationale was that I wanted them to understand our concern for them not only in the meetings we had but in their tragic imprisonment. The Korean government also gave permission for the visit. Accompanied by those two KCIA “thugs” referred to earlier in this interview (I guess I was their special assignment) I visited Yoon-sik in prison and brought him books. We discussed his situation and he was naturally discouraged. To make a long story short, the prison sentences for Yoon-sik and the others were shortened from seven years to eight months. Upon their release from prison, much to my surprise, all of them visited my office at the Embassy to thank me for what I had done. They claimed that the Korean government canceled their prison terms because of the interest and concern shown by the American Embassy because of the efforts made to have me visit.

The sequel: All of the Mintong members have succeeded in Korean society as government officials, journalists, labor leaders and businessmen. Yoon-sik was appointed to the National Assembly in the 1970's. Then he joined the Economic Institute which is sponsoring his sabbatical at the University of Hawaii. After my retirement here in Hawaii in 1986, we saw each other a number of times and he visited my home. We had much to talk about! He told me that his greatest mistake was dreaming up that idea of organizing a student march to Panmunjom!

The Defusing Of Radical Students 3-Day Takeover Of USIS Building In Seoul: 1985

The last student-related story deals with the occupation of the USIS building in Seoul May 23-25, 1985. Seventy three students, in a well coordinated move, overwhelmed the Korean police guarding our building, and barricaded themselves in our large library. The Political Counselor, Harry Dunlap and I chose the path of patience, dialogue and persuasion. We were getting advice from Washington, the Korean government, Ministry officials, the Korean police, Korean professors and so-called experts in how to deal with the students. The advice ranged from “Throw them out,” “Call in the Army,” “Turn the

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police loose on them,” “Starve them out,” “Drug them” to “Let them stay there till they drop” or “Tear gas the rascals.” Ambassador Walker, despite very heavy pressure on him from some circles at State and the Blue House, supported the position Harry and I had taken. During the three days and nights of discussion, Harry did a masterful job in firmly but diplomatically rejecting the absurd demands. On the second morning I talked to the whole group and reminded them that earlier generations of students and their professors had often used USIS for exchanges of opinions with Americans. I told them there was no need for them to use violence to get our attention. Their demands should have been directed to the Korean government but they felt the U.S. was a good vehicle for attracting attention. I used the names of many of the students and professors who had come to USIS in the past, peacefully. This seemed to impress them and Harry later reported that this appeal to the 73 students had a palpable effect.

Emotions were high all around. Some of the students threatened to kill themselves in front of the TV cameras or to cut off their fingers or poison themselves. In my talks with Harry and the Ambassador I urged patience. I felt there was a serious possibility that some of the students might be injured or killed because the police, as they told me, were itching to get their hands on the students. The Korean government had been embarrassed by the event and media coverage world-wide. My final argument was that if a student were to be killed, for years afterwards, on the anniversary of the death, flowers would surely be brought to USIS—hardly a welcome prospect to associate USIS with a martyr.

The students were finally persuaded to leave. At 12 noon on the third day they formed up in the library, put on their head bands, sang songs, hugged each other and marched out to the TV cameras. They were quickly taken by the police. In Washington there was ecstasy that the ordeal was peacefully resolved. The Ambassador and DCM came over to my office to join Harry and me and the staff which had performed superbly throughout the 3 days and nights. Mr. Wick called the Ambassador to congratulate him. Harry was given a Superior Honor Award by State as I was by USIA. I also appreciated the fact that State also gave me a Superior Honor Award. The Korean press was highly laudatory as was

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the academic community of “the wisdom and skill of the U. S. government in handling this explosive situation.” All was well that ended well.

Q: All right. Thanks, Bernie. This is Mike Brown reporting on an interview with Bernie Lavin for the Oral History of USIA from Kaimuki, the heart of downtown Honolulu.

End of interview